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AUTHOR	Ottinger, Cecilia; Root, Mark
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ABSTRACT

The main problems facing city school districts as recognized by urban school leaders, school boards, superintendents, and school administrators are described and forecast. Results are based on an August 1992 survey of the leadership of the Council of the Great City Schools (GCS) about enrollment trends, supply and demand of teachers, financial conditions, and school reform. In addition, leaders were asked to identify the most pressing current problems and the most likely future ones facing urban education. In the next five years, GCS schools expect an increase in enrollment at all grade levels. Most have recently experienced a net gain in numbers of teachers, and most expect an increase in the hiring of full-time teachers. District-wide reform is being implemented almost universally in urban school districts in one form or another. These reforms are accompanied by a general decline in local revenues. Leaders have voiced strong concerns about: (1) the health of urban schools and the surrounding communities, (2) parent involvement, (3) acquired immune deficiency syndrome, (4) violence, (5) the influx of immigrants, (6) school reform and educational assessment, and (7) how the public views urban education. Four figures and two tables illustrate the discussion. (Contains 5 references.) (SLD)

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Critical Educational Trends: A Poll of America's Urban Schools

by the
Council of the Great City Schools

ED 369 875

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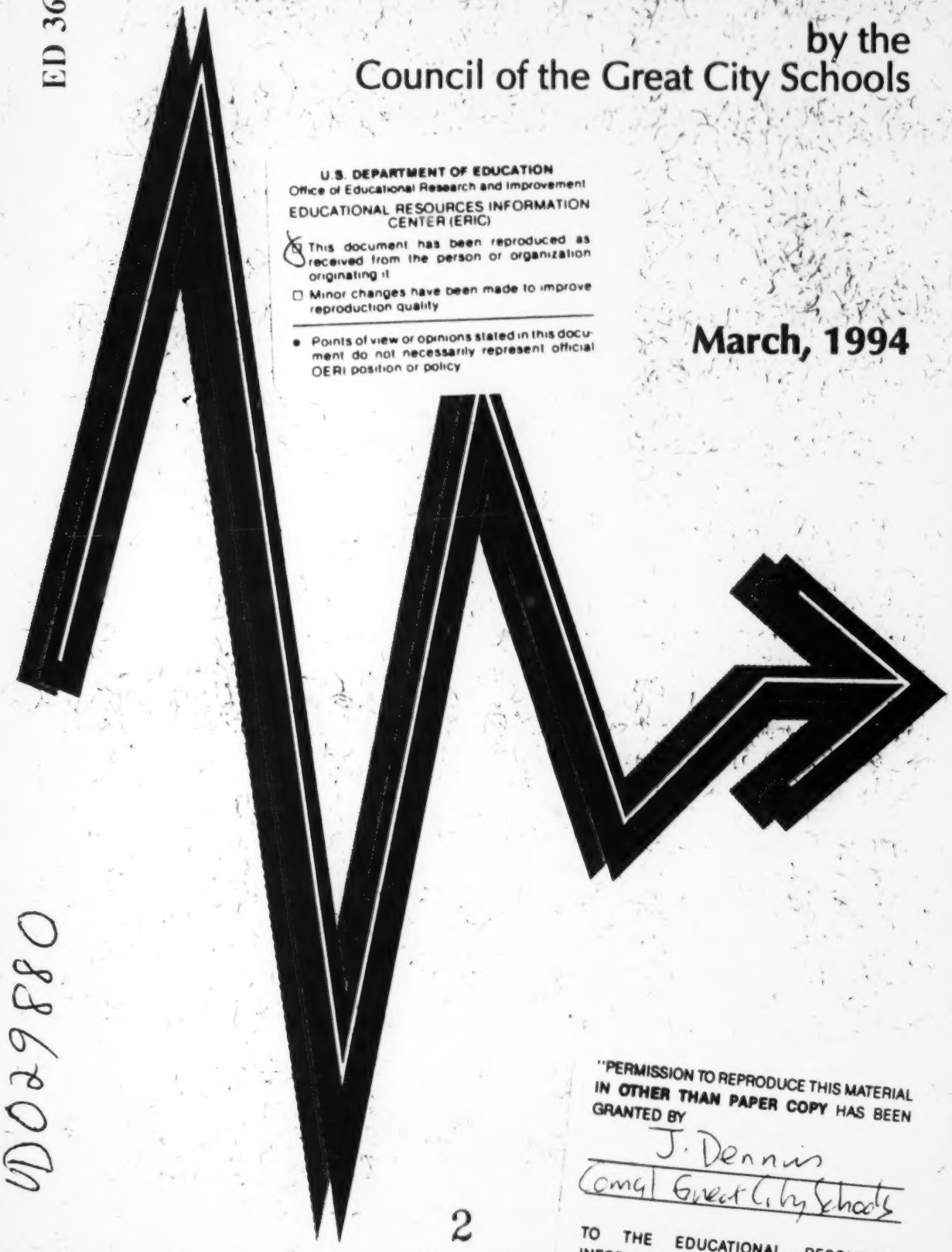

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Critical Educational Trends:
A Poll of America's Urban Schools

by
Cecilia Ottinger
Director of Research

and
Mark Root
Research and Systems Specialist

Council of the Great City Schools
March, 1994

Michael Casserly
Executive Director

Council of the Great City Schools
1301 Pennsylvania Avenue, N.W.
Suite 702
Washington, D.C. 20004
(202) 393-2427

Introduction

America's cities are facing great challenges: increasing poverty, budgetary constraints, influx of immigrants, drug use, crime and violence, decaying infrastructure, shrinking middle class tax base, and a declining job base.

These urban problems do not exist in isolation but affect each of our cities' social institutions, including one of their most important: schools and the children they serve.

The purpose of this report is to describe and forecast the main problems facing city school districts from the perspective of urban school leaders, school boards, superintendents and school administrators.

The results are based on an August 1993 survey of the leadership of the Council of the Great City Schools (GCS) on enrollment trends, supply and demand of teachers, financial conditions and school reform. In addition, urban leaders were asked to identify the 10 most pressing current and 10 most likely future issues facing urban education.

The first section of this survey addresses several overarching questions: What is happening with urban enrollments? What changes are occurring with the urban teaching force? Are urban school districts engaged in reform and the restructuring of schools? What is the state of the economic resources in urban schools?

The answers to these questions shape how urban school leaders view current and future conditions in their districts.

The second part of the survey compares the top ten current and future issues facing Great City Schools and contrasts them with the views of the nation's educational leaders at large[1].

Highlights of Findings:

- During the next five years, GCS districts are expecting an increase in enrollments at all grade levels.

- During school years 1991-92 to 1992-93, most urban school districts experienced a net gain in the numbers of teachers. In the future, urban school districts expect an increase in the hiring of full-time teachers.

- District-wide reform is a mechanism that is being implemented almost universally in urban school districts in one form or another.

- In the last school year most GCS leaders indicated their school districts experienced declines in local revenues.

- GCS leaders indicate strong concern for the health of urban schools and the surrounding communities; parents involvement; HIV/AIDS; violence; the influx of immigrants; school reform and assessment; and how the public views urban public education.

- Assessment and its surrounding issues are future concerns for urban as well as national educational leaders.

Urban School Environment

This section reviews how urban leaders perceive their schools being shaped demographically and structurally.

Enrollment: A Five-Year Perspective

Enrollments are expected to increase over the next five years in urban public schools.

- Some 85.5 percent of the Council of Great City Schools' (GCS) leaders expect an increase in overall school enrollments over the next five years.

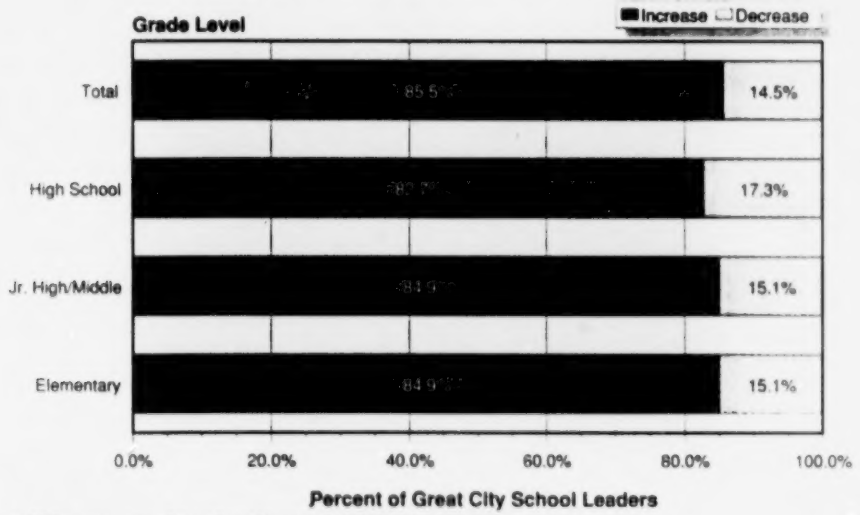
- Urban school leaders in the Great Cities expect growth in urban school enrollments at both the elementary and secondary levels (84.9 percent for both) [figure 1].

- The K-12 public school enrollments nationally are expected to increase by 8.1 percent, from 43.4 million in 1993 to 46.9 million in 1998 (NCES, 1992).

- Public K-8 enrollments nationally are expected to increase by 5.0 percent between 1993 and 1998 (from 31.8 million to 33.4 million), while enrollments in public schools are predicted to increase by 13.3 percent (12.0 million to 13.6 million).

Figure 1

Percent of GCS Leaders Expecting Urban School Enrollment Changes in the Next Five Years, 1993



N=59 Superintendents, School Board Members, and School Administrators

Source: Council of the Great City Schools

- Between 1980 and 1990 the GCS retained their share of the nation's total public school enrollment at 13.1 percent.

Changes in the Teaching Force

- During school years 1992-93 and 1993-94, it appears that most of the increases in the number of GCS teachers were in special education; almost three-quarters (72.5 percent) of GCS administrators indicated that they experienced a net gain in these teachers [figure 2].

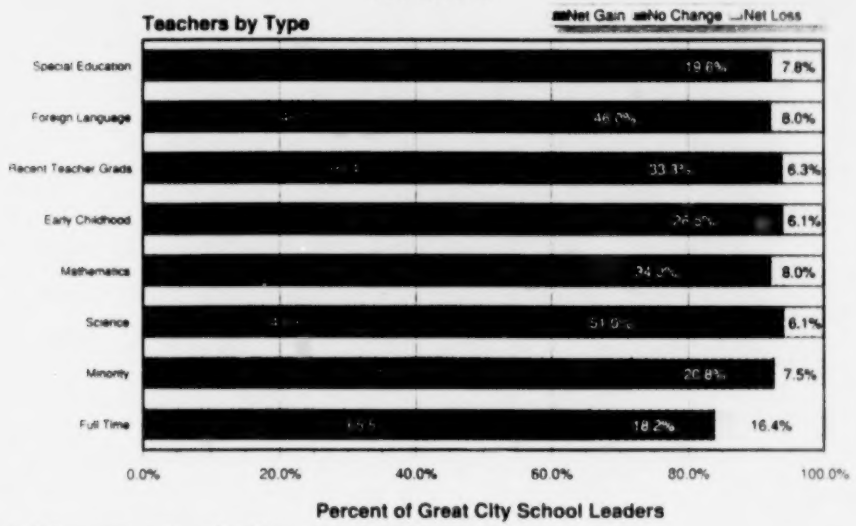
—In 1990, more than half (54.8 percent) of GCS students were eligible for free or reduced priced lunch (GCS, 1993).

—More than one-third (35.9 percent) of all students with Limited English Proficiency (LEP) attended GCS.

- Between school years 1992-93 and 1993-94, 65.5 percent of the GCS leaders expected a net gain in the number of permanent full-time teachers, another 18.2 percent expected no change in the size of their teaching force, while 16.4 percent expected a loss [figure 2].

Figure 2

Percent of GCS Leaders Expecting Changes in the Number of Teachers



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Source: Council of the Great City Schools

- It appears that progress was also made in diversifying the teaching force. Between 1992-93 and 1993-94, 71.7 percent of GCS leaders noted a net increase in teachers of color.

- There was a 42.9 percent net increase in science teachers between 1992-93 and 1993-94.

- Most of the GCS leaders (83.7 percent) expect an increase in the teaching force over the next five years.

- Employment prospects for teachers nationally are expected to improve considerably over the next several years. For example, between 1992 and 2005, the number of jobs for special education teachers is expected to increase by 74 percent (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 1993).

- Schools of teacher education appear to be the most likely source for urban teachers in the future. Most (85.7 percent) urban school districts expecting to hire teachers over the next five years indicate that they will recruit school of education graduates.

School Reform

There has been a sustained national discussion since the early 1980s about the accountability of educators to the taxpayers of America. Currently there are national and urban education goals to measure the progress of schools and to increase accountability, to raise standards and develop alternative assessments of students' progress. Urban leaders have been involved in this movement and have often been in the forefront of these site-based changes.

- The overwhelming majority (96.2 percent) of GCS leaders noted that they are implementing district-wide reforms.

- The five strategies in district-wide reform used most often by urban school districts were:

—Decentralized decision-making structure, 86.4 percent;

—Recruitment programs for minority teachers and multicultural curriculum, 83.1 percent (each);

—School based self-assessment, 76.3 percent; and

—Teacher professional development programs, 67.8 percent.

Economic Resources

Our nation's cities over the last decade have been faced with extraordinary financial problems. The federal deficit has dampened funding at all levels of government; and cities which face many of society's severest problems, have had to do with less.

It is clear that inner city schools have felt the pinch of dwindling resources and now must grapple with increasing enrollments, more poor and immigrant children, increased crime and other urban social problems.

- Most GCS leaders (83.1 percent) noted that their school districts have grappled with the issue of increasingly competing social needs in the last year.

- Slightly more than four out of five (81.4 percent) GCS district leaders indicated that they experienced a decline in local revenues during the last year.

- During the period 1980 to 1990, the percent of GCS revenues from federal sources declined from 11.9 percent to 9.1 percent (Council of the Great City Schools, 1992) while the share of federal funding devoted to city schools increased from 19.7% to 21.3%.

- During the same period, the percent of total state K-12 education expenditures devoted to GCS declined from 14.6 percent to 14.4 percent.

- Yet another financial condition faced by school districts in the last year was the inequitable distribution of state educational funds as noted by 79.7 percent of the respondents.

The strategies being used most often by school districts for addressing these financial conditions were:

- More than four out of five levied taxes (81.4 percent); and

- About three-quarters (74.6 percent) consolidated schools.

Current and Future Issues in Great City Schools

There are several broad areas of concern for GCS leaders today, including: the involvement of parents in the school system, social issues such as violence, health, and immigrants, other governance issues like school management and the perception of public education.

The challenges of the present are expected to continue into the future. From the GCS responses it is clear that systemic change is a continuing trend for the future—from assessment, accountability and restructuring, to concern about early intervention. In addition, the impact of social issues on school districts is evident in the concerns about violence, limited English proficient students, and society's commitment to urban schools.

Management Issues:

Current

- Almost 3 out of 5 GCS leaders (59.3 percent) indicated that the accountability of administrators, restructuring the management of schools and school reform is a current concern [table 1 and figure 3].

- In comparison, 20 percent of national school leaders noted that they are facing these issues [figure 3].

- GCS leaders were two times more likely than national leaders to indicate that site-based management was an issue of concern (44 percent vs. 22 percent).

- GCS are large and complex entities: they employ 297,645 teachers; the student population totals 5.4 million; there are 7,392 schools; and total revenues of $31.8 billion. These statistics give a glimpse of size and scale of the GCS and the fact that school leaders are managing huge systems.

Table 1

Top Ten Current Issues Identified by Great City School Leaders, 1993, Compared to Nation's Concern on Same Issues

	Issue	Percent of GCS	Nation
1.	Violence and gang related activity	82.7%	18.0%
2.	Parent involvement	71.2%	44.4%
3.	Bilingual education and non-English speaking students	64.4%	12.0%
4.	School reform and restructuring of schools	59.3%	20.0%
5.	Site-based management	44.0%	22.0%
6.	Early intervention/early childhood education	38.9%	12.0%
7.	Adequate finance/funding of schools	35.6%	34.0%
8.	Increasing achievement of all students	30.5%	NA
9.	HIV/AIDS education	30.5%	17.0%
10.	Equity issues	28.8%	14.0%

Source: Council of the Great City Schools, 1993; Phi Delta Kappan, Center for Evaluation and Research, Annual Needs Assessment, June 1993

Figure 3

Top Ten Current Issues Identified by Great City School Leaders, 1993, Compared to Nation's Concern on Same Issues

N=59 Superintendents, School Board Members, and School Administrators

Source: Council of the Great City Schools, 1993, Phi Delta Kappan, Center for Evaluation and Research, Annual Needs Assessment, June 1993

Future

- More than half (55.9 percent) of urban leaders indicated that restructuring the management of schools and the accountability of administrators was a future issue to be addressed versus 25 percent from the national poll [table 2 and figure 4].

Economic Issues:

Current

Given the current economic climate in the nation, the funding of urban school systems appears to be a severe issue for GCS leaders.

- More than one-third (35.6 percent) of the respondents noted that obtaining adequate resources and the funding of schools is a concern. This issue was almost equally of concern to national education leaders, with 34 percent of national education leaders indicating that finance/funding was a current problem in education.

Future

The problem of funding of urban schools is expected to fluctuate somewhat with the economy but to remain a serious concern in the future for urban schools.

Parent and the Community Issues:

Current

One of the issues foremost on the minds of GCS leaders is the relationship between parents and the schools.

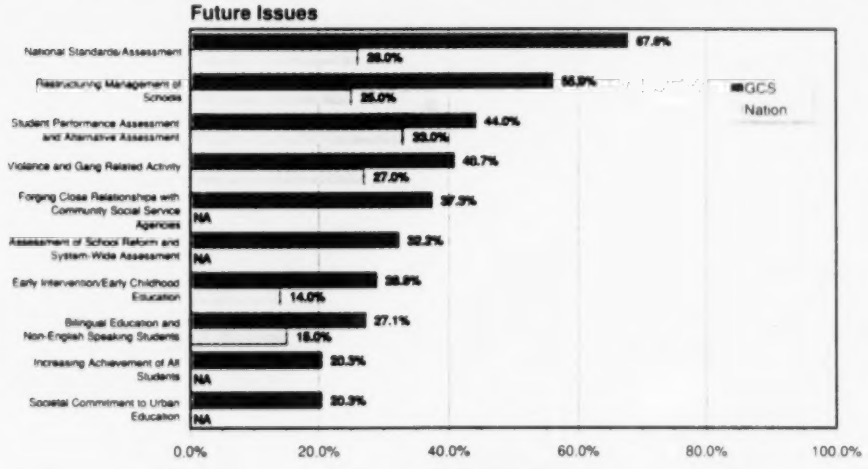
- Almost three-quarters (71.2 percent) of the GCS respondents listed parental involvement and parent, teacher and school cooperation as an issue in urban education.

- This issue was not of as much concern for national school leaders, with 44.4 percent identifying this as a current problem.

- It also is clear that the recent influx of immigrants into cities is a concern for GCS administrators more than for their national

Figure 4

Top Ten Future Issues Identified by Great City School Leaders, 1993, Compared to Nation's Concern on Same Issues



N=59 Superintendents, School Board Members, and School Administrators

Source: Council of the Great City Schools, 1993; Phi Delta Kappan, Center for Evaluation and Research, Annual Needs Assessment, June 1993

Table 2

Top Ten Future Issues Identified by Great City School Leaders, 1993, Compared to Nation's Concern on Same Issues

	Issue	Percent of GCS	Nation
1.	National standards/assessment	67.6%	26.0%
2.	Restructuring management of schools	55.9%	25.0%
3.	Student performance assessment and alternative assessment	44.0%	33.0%
4.	Violence and gang related activity	40.7%	27.0%
5.	Forging close relationships with community social service agencies	37.3%	NA
6.	Assessment of school reform and system-wide assessment	32.2%	NA
7.	Early intervention/early childhood education	28.8%	14.0%
8.	Bilingual education and non-English speaking students	27.1%	15.0%
9.	Increasing achievement of all students	20.3%	NA
10.	Societal commitment to urban education	20.3%	NA

Source: Council of the Great City Schools, 1993; Phi Delta Kappan, Center for Evaluation and Research, Annual Needs Assessment, June 1993

counterparts. Almost two-thirds (64.4 percent) of GCS leaders identified bilingual education and non-English speaking students as a current issue versus 13 percent of national leaders.

- Today over 120 languages are spoken by students in the GCS.

According to a recent study of immigrant youth, most new immigrants are concentrated in the nation's largest cities (McDonnell and Hall, 1993). A considerable number of the new immigrants are children. This population is also characterized by unprecedented racial and ethnic diversity (Raffle, et. al, 1993).

Future

- The issue of providing bilingual education is expected to be a major problem for GCS leaders in the future; more than one-quarter (27.1 percent) of GCS leaders indicated that this was a future issue to be addressed.

—National leaders were only half as likely to identify this as a future concern (14.1 percent).

Social Issues:

Current

- Violence and gang related activity is the top current concern of urban school leaders, with 82.7 percent noting this issue; in comparison, 18.0 percent of national leaders cited this as a current issue.

The current epidemic of AIDS is an issue that is also affecting urban school systems.

- Slightly more that 3 out of 10 (30.5 percent) of GCS leaders identified AIDS and AIDS education as a problem compared to 17 percent of national education leaders.

- Equity issues were cited by 28.8 percent of the GCS administrators in comparison to 14 percent of the national leaders.

- Almost two out of five (38.9 percent) GCS administrators identified early intervention/early childhood education as a problem they are currently facing in comparison to 12 percent of national education leaders.

Future

- Violence and gang related activity is expected to be a future concern to 40.7 percent of the GCS leaders in comparison to 27 percent of the national leaders.

- Early intervention and early childhood education continues to be a concern for 28.8 percent of the GCS administrators and only 7 percent of national school leaders.

- More than one out of five (20.3 percent) of GCS leaders indicated that societal commitment to urban education will be a future concern.

Assessment Issues:

Future

Assessment appears to be a future concern to GCS leaders.

- The number one future concern of GCS leaders was national standards and assessment; more than two-thirds (67.6 percent) of the respondents identified this as an issue. Further, GCS leaders also feel that increasing the achievement of students is a major issue for the future (20.3 percent).

- A little more than a quarter (26 percent) of national education leaders cited national standards and assessment as a future problem.

- There also appears to be a concern about assessing students; 44.0 percent of GCS leaders indicated that the assessment of students' performance and alternative assessments will continue to be an issue in urban schools. National leaders were less likely to view this as a future problem (13 percent).

- The accountability of students is expected to be a concern by 16.9 percent of GCS leaders versus 8.5 percent of education leaders nationally.

Implications

It appears that urban school districts are faced with a great many challenges in trying to provide an education to largely poor and immigrant populations. These challenges, coupled with an expected increase in enrollments, the need to hire more teachers and to implement more reforms, indicate that urban school leaders must deal not only with the problems that pertain to education solely but also must cope with the effects of poverty and other social ills. The data from this poll raises several questions:

- How can urban schools tailor their services to such diverse and needy children on such little funding?

- How can urban schools increase the involvement and commitment of parents?

- Should urban schools be trying to meet so many needs and what are the alternatives?

- Is America prepared to invest in urban education in a way that will ensure adequate opportunities for inner city youth or is the country content to abandon urban schools?

- How can new standards and assessment tools be developed in ways that will enhance rather then constrain equity?

- Are the concerns of GCS leaders simply a precursor of the education needs of the nation at large?

Note

[1]The Phi Delta Kappan annual survey on needs assessment was used in this report as a bench mark for comparing urban school leaders with national school leaders. However, it should be noted that the Phi Delta Kappan survey and the Great City Schools survey are not directly comparable.

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